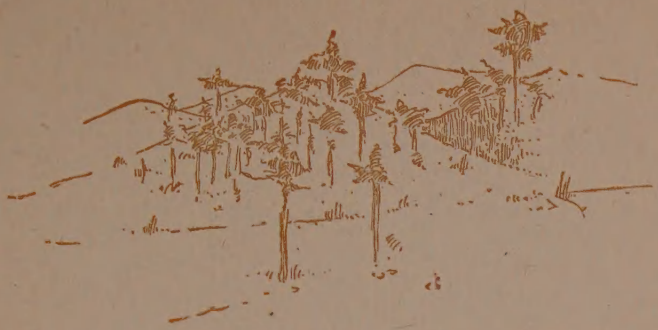
GWEN

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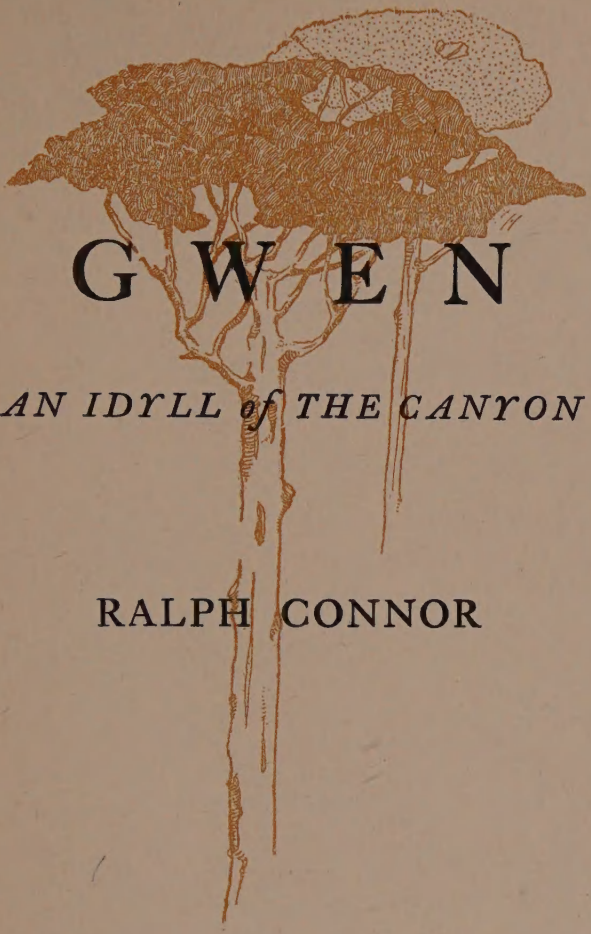
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Presented,
To, Ellen Ruth Maunder.
As a reward for good
spelling when 8 years old
by her Aunt Emma,
April 1905
Hastings Nebr.



GWEN



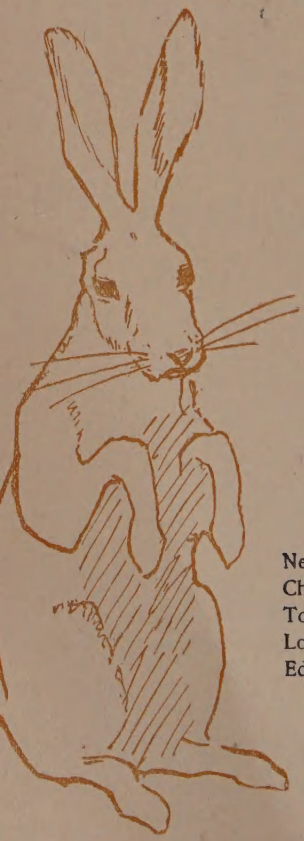
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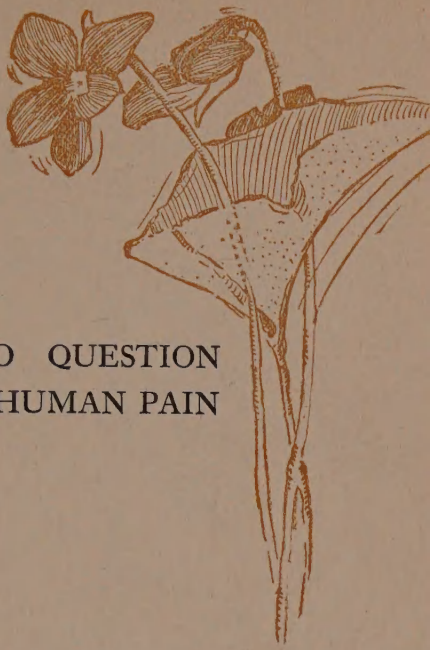
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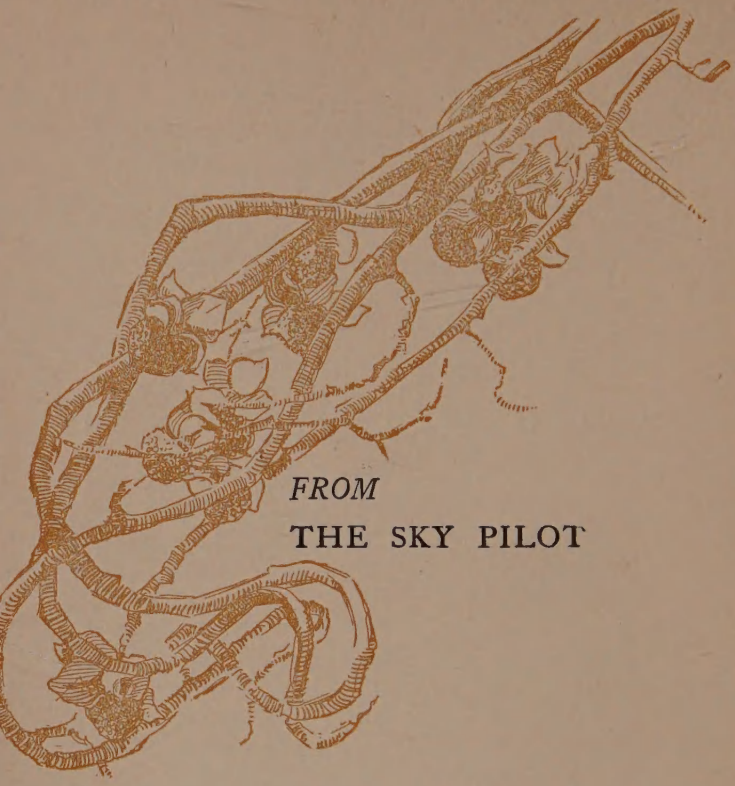


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TO ALL WHO QUESTION
THE *WHY* OF HUMAN PAIN



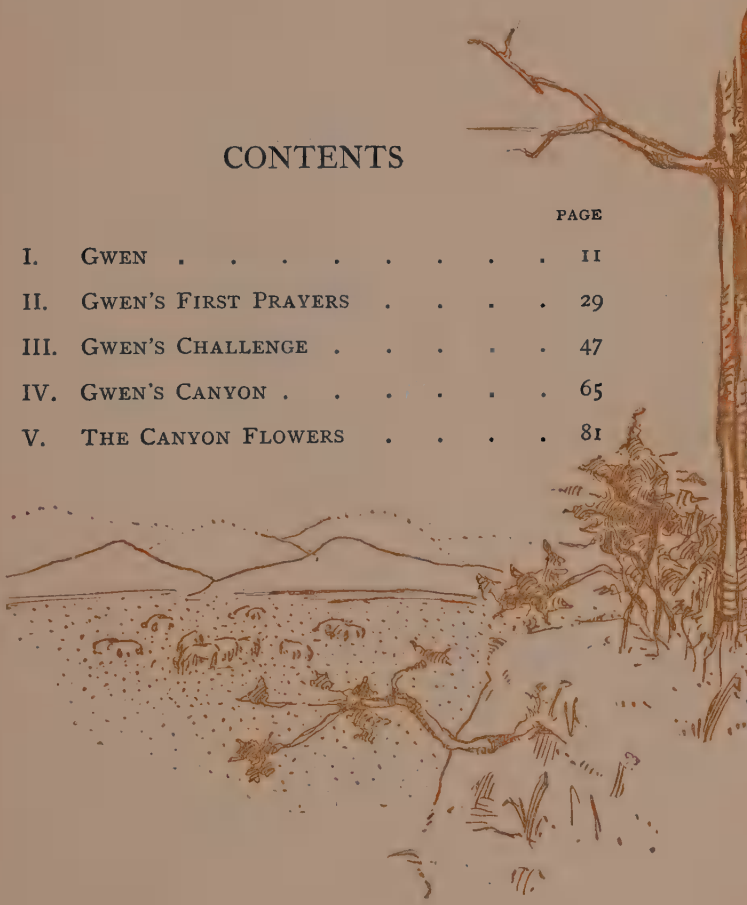


FROM

THE SKY PILOT

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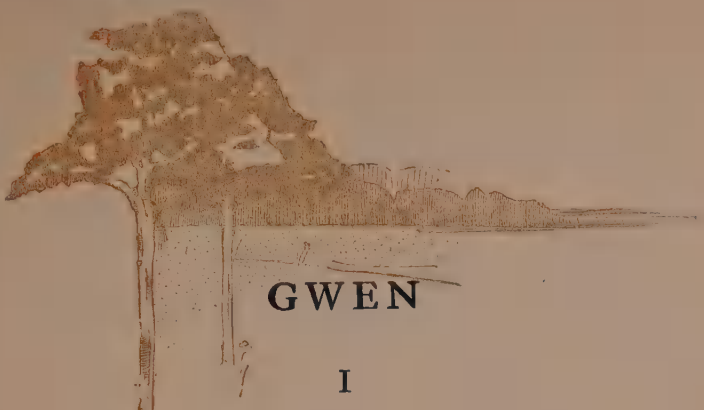




GWEN







GWEN

I

GWEN

It was not many days after my arrival in the Foothill country that I began to hear of Gwen. They all had stories of her. The details were not many, but the impression was vivid. She lived remote from that centre of civilization known as Swan Creek in the postal guide, but locally as Old Latour's, far up among the hills near the Devil's Lake, and from her father's ranch she never ventured. But some of the men had had glimpses of her and had come to definite opinions regarding her.

"What is she like?" I asked Bill one day, trying to pin him down to something like a descriptive account of her.

"Like! She's a terrer," he said, with slow emphasis, "a holy terrer."

"But what is she like? What does she look like?" I asked impatiently.

"Look like?" He considered a moment, looked slowly round as if searching for a simile, then answered: "I dunno."

"Don't know? What do you mean? Haven't you seen her?"

"Yeh! But she ain't like nuthin'."

Bill was quite decided upon this point.

I tried again.

"Well, what sort of hair has she got? She's got hair, I suppose?"

"Hayer! Well, a few!" said Bill, with some choice combinations of profanity in repudiation of my suggestion. "Yards of it! Red!"

"Git out!" contradicted Hi. "Red! 'Tain't no more red than mine!"

Bill regarded Hi's hair critically.

"What color do you put onto your old brush?" he asked cautiously.

"'Tain't no difference. 'Tain't red, anyhow."

"Red! Well, not quite exactly," and Bill went off into a low, long, choking chuckle,

ejaculating now and then, "Red! Jee-mi-ny Ann! Red!"

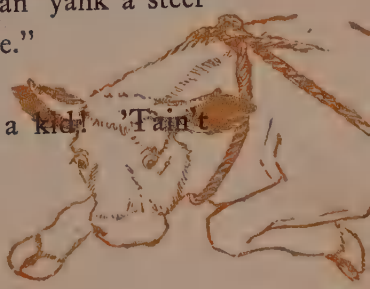
"No, Hi," he went on, recovering himself with the same abruptness as he used with his bronco and looking at his friend with a face even more than usually solemr "your hayer ain't red, Hi; don't let any of your relatives persuade you to that. 'Tain't red!" and he threatened to go off again, but pulled himself up with dangerous suddenness. "It may be blue, cerulyum blue or even purple, but red——!" He paused violently, looking at his friend as if he found him a new and interesting object of study upon which he could not trust himself to speak. Nor could he be induced to proceed with the description he had begun.

But Hi, paying no attention to Bill's oration, took up the subject with enthusiasm.

"She kin ride—she's a reg'lar buster to ride, ain't she, Bill?" Bill nodded. "She kin bunch cattle an' cut out an' yank a steer up to any cowboy on the range."

"Why, how big is she?"

"Big? Why, she's just a kid! 'Tain't



the bigness of her, it's the nerve. She's got the coldest kind of nerve you ever seen. Hain't she, Bill?" And again Bill nodded.

"'Member the day she dropped that steer, Bill?" went on Hi.

"What was that?" I asked, eager for a yarn.

"Oh, nuthin'," said Bill.

"Nuthin'!" retorted Hi. "Pretty big nuthin'!"

"What was it?" I urged.

"Oh, Bill here did some funny work at old Meredith's round-up, but he don't speak of it. He's shy, you see," and Hi grinned.

"Well, there ain't no occasion for your proceedin' onto that tact," said Bill disgustedly, and Hi loyally refrained, so I have never yet got the rights of the story. But from what I did hear I gathered that Bill, at the risk of his life, had pulled The Duke from under the hoofs of a mad steer, and that little Gwen had, in the coolest possible manner, "sailed in on her bronco," and by putting two bullets into the steer's head, had

saved them both from great danger, perhaps from death, for the rest of the cattle were crowding near. Of course Bill could never be persuaded to speak of the incident. A true Western man will never hesitate to tell you what he can do, but of what he has done he does not readily speak.

The only other item that Hi contributed to the sketch of Gwen was that her temper could blaze if the occasion demanded.

"'Member young Hill, Bill?"

Bill "'membered."

"Didn't she cut into him sudden? Sarved him right, too."

"What did she do?"

"Cut him across the face with her *quirt* in good style."

"What for?"

"Knockin' about her Indian Joe."

Joe was, as I came to learn, Ponka's son and Gwen's most devoted slave.

"Oh, she ain't no refrigerator."

"Yes," assented Bill. "She's a leetle swift."

Then, as if fearing he had been apologiz-

ing for her, he added, with the air of one settling the question: "But she's good stock! She suits me!"

The Duke helped me to another side of her character.

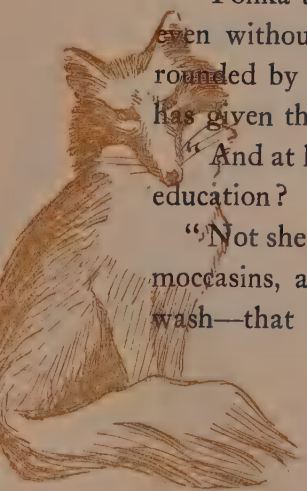
"She is a remarkable child," he said, one day. "Wild and shy as a coyote, but fearless, quite; and with a heart full of passions. Meredith, the Old Timer, you know, has kept her up there among the hills. She sees no one but himself and Ponka's Blackfeet relations, who treat her like a goddess and help to spoil her utterly. She knows their lingo and their ways—goes off with them for a week at a time."

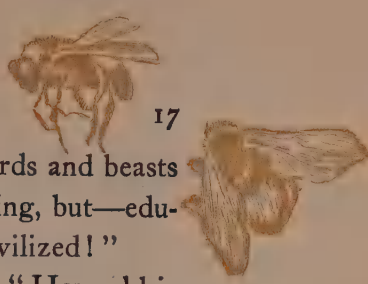
"What! With the Blackfeet?"

"Ponka and Joe, of course, go along; but even without them she is as safe as if surrounded by the Coldstream Guards, but she has given them up for some time now."

"And at home?" I asked. "Has she any education? Can she read or write?"

"Not she. She can make her own dresses, moccasins, and leggings. She can cook and wash—that is, when she feels in the mood.





And she knows all about the birds and beasts and flowers and that sort of thing, but—education! Why, she is hardly civilized!"

"What a shame!" I said. "How old is she?"

"Oh, a mere child; fourteen or fifteen, I imagine; but a woman in many things."

"And what does her father say to all this? Can he control her?"

"Control!" said The Duke, in utter astonishment. "Why, bless your soul, nothing in heaven or earth could control *her!* Wait till you see her stand with her proud little head thrown back, giving orders to Joe, and you will never again connect the idea of control with Gwen. She might be a princess for the pride of her. I've seen some, too, in my day, but none to touch her for sheer, imperial pride, little Lucifer that she is."

"And how does her father stand her nonsense?" I asked, for I confess I was not much taken with the picture The Duke had drawn.

"Her father simply follows behind her and adores, as do all things that come near her, down, or up, perhaps, to her two dogs—Wolf

and Loo—for either of which she would readily die if need be. Still," he added, after a pause, "it is a shame, as you say. She ought to know something of the refinements of civilization, to which, after all, she belongs, and from which none of us can hope to escape." The Duke was silent for a few moments, and then added, with some hesitation: "Then, too, she is quite a pagan; never saw a prayer-book, you know."

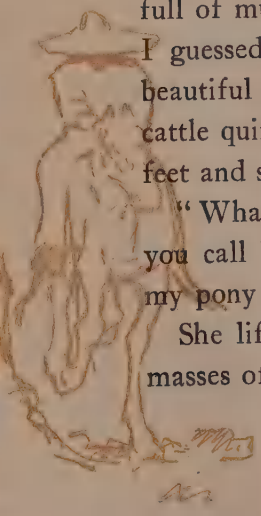
And so it came about, chiefly through The Duke's influence, I imagine, that I was engaged by the Old Timer to go up to his ranch every week and teach his daughter something of the elementaries of a lady's education.

My introduction was ominous of the many things I was to suffer of that same young maiden before I had finished my course with her. The Old Timer had given careful directions as to the trail that would lead me to the canyon where he was to meet me. Up the Swan went the trail, winding ever downward into deeper and narrower coulées and up to higher open sunlit slopes, till suddenly it

settled into a valley which began with great width and narrowed to a canyon whose rocky sides were dressed out with shrubs and trailing vines and wet with trickling rivulets from the numerous springs that oozed and gushed from the black, glistening rocks. This canyon was an eerie place of which ghostly tales were told from the old Blackfeet times. And to this day no Blackfoot will dare to pass through this black-walled, oozy, glistening canyon after the moon has passed the western lip. But in the warm light of broad day the canyon was a good enough place, cool and sweet, and I lingered through, waiting for the Old Timer, who failed to appear till the shadows began to darken its western black sides.

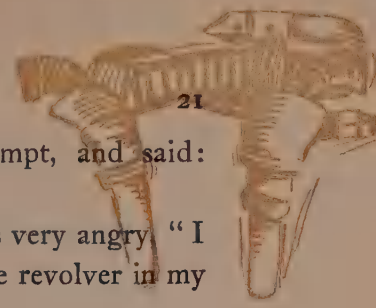
Out of the mouth of the canyon the trail climbed to a wide stretch of prairie that swept up over soft hills to the left and down to the bright gleaming water of the Devil's Lake on the right. In the sunlight the lake lay like a gem radiant with many colors, the far side black in the shadow of the crowding pines, then in the middle deep, blue and purple, and

nearer, many shades of emerald that ran quite to the white, sandy beach. Right in front stood the ranch buildings upon a slight rising ground and surrounded by a sturdy palisade of upright pointed poles. This was the castle of the princess. I rode up to the open gate, then turned and stood to look down upon the marvellous lake shining and shimmering with its many radiant colors. Suddenly there was an awful roar, my pony shot round upon his hind legs after his beastly cayuse manner, deposited me sitting upon the ground, and fled down the trail, pursued by two huge dogs that brushed past me as I fell. I was aroused from my amazement by a peal of laughter, shrill but full of music. Turning, I saw my pupil, as I guessed, standing at the head of a most beautiful *pinto* (spotted) pony with a heavy cattle quirt in her hand. I scrambled to my feet and said, somewhat angrily, I fear:



"What are you laughing at? Why don't you call back your dogs? They will chase my pony beyond all reach."

She lifted her little head, shook back her masses of brown-red hair, looked at me as if



I were quite beneath contempt, and said: "No; they will kill him."

"Then," said I, for I was very angry, "I will kill them," pulling at the revolver in my belt.

"Then," she said, and for the first time I noticed her eyes, blue-black with gray rims, "I will kill you," and she whipped out an ugly-looking revolver. From her face I had no doubt that she would not hesitate to do as she had said. I changed my tactics, for I was anxious about my pony, and said, with my best smile:

"Can't you call them back? Won't they obey you?"

Her face changed in a moment.

"Is it your pony? Do you love him very much?"

"Dearly!" I said, persuading myself of a sudden affection for the cranky little brute.

She sprang upon her pinto and set off down the trail. The pony was now coursing up and down the slopes, doubling like a hare, instinctively avoiding the canyon where he would be cornered. He was mad with terror

at the huge brutes that were silently, but with awful and sure swiftness, running him down.

The girl on the pinto whistled shrilly, and called to her dogs: "Down, Wolf! Back, Loo!" but, running low, with long, stretched bodies, they heeded not, but sped on, ever gaining upon the pony that now circled toward the pinto. As they drew near in their circling, the girl urged her pinto to meet them, loosening her lariat as she went. As the pony neared the pinto he slackened his speed; immediately the nearer dog gathered herself in two short jumps and sprang for the pony's throat. But, even as she sprang, the lariat whirled round the girl's head and fell swift and sure about the dog's neck, and the next moment she lay choking on the prairie. Her mate paused, looked back, and gave up the chase. But dire vengeance overtook them, for, like one possessed, the girl fell upon them with her quirt and beat them one after the other till, in pity for the brutes, I interposed.

"They shall do as I say or I shall kill them! I shall kill them!" she cried, raging and stamping.

"Better shoot them," I suggested, pulling out my pistol.

Immediately she flung herself upon the one that moaned and whined at her feet, crying:

"If you dare! If you dare!" Then she burst into passionate sobbing. "You bad Loo! You bad, dear old Loo! But you *were* bad—you *know* you were bad!" and so she went on with her arms about Loo's neck till Loo, whining and quivering with love and delight, threatened to go quite mad, and Wolf, standing majestically near, broke into short howls of impatience for his turn of caressing. They made a strange group, those three wild things, equally fierce and passionate in hate and in love.

Suddenly the girl remembered me, and standing up, she said, half ashamed:

"They always obey *me*. They are *mine*, but they kill any strange thing that comes in through the gate. They are allowed to."

"It is a pleasant whim."

"What?"

"I mean isn't that dangerous to strangers?"

"Oh, no one ever comes alone, except The Duke. And they keep off the wolves."

"The Duke comes, does he?"

"Yes!" and her eyes lit up. "He is my friend. He calls me his 'princess,' and he teaches me to talk and tells me stories—oh, wonderful stories!"

I looked in wonder at her face, so gentle, so girlish, and tried to think back to the picture of the girl who a few moments before had so coolly threatened to shoot me and had so furiously beaten her dogs.

I kept her talking of The Duke as we walked back to the gate, watching her face the while. It was not beautiful; it was too thin, and the mouth was too large. But the teeth were good and the eyes, blue-black with gray rims, looked straight at you; true eyes and brave, whether in love or in war. Her hair was her glory. Red it was, in spite of Hi's denial, but of such marvellous, indescribable shade that in certain lights, as she rode over the prairie, it streamed behind her like a pur-

ple banner. A most confusing and bewildering color, but quite in keeping with the nature of the owner.

She gave her pinto to Joe, and, standing at the door, welcomed me with a dignity and graciousness that made me think that The Duke was not far wrong when he named her "Princess."

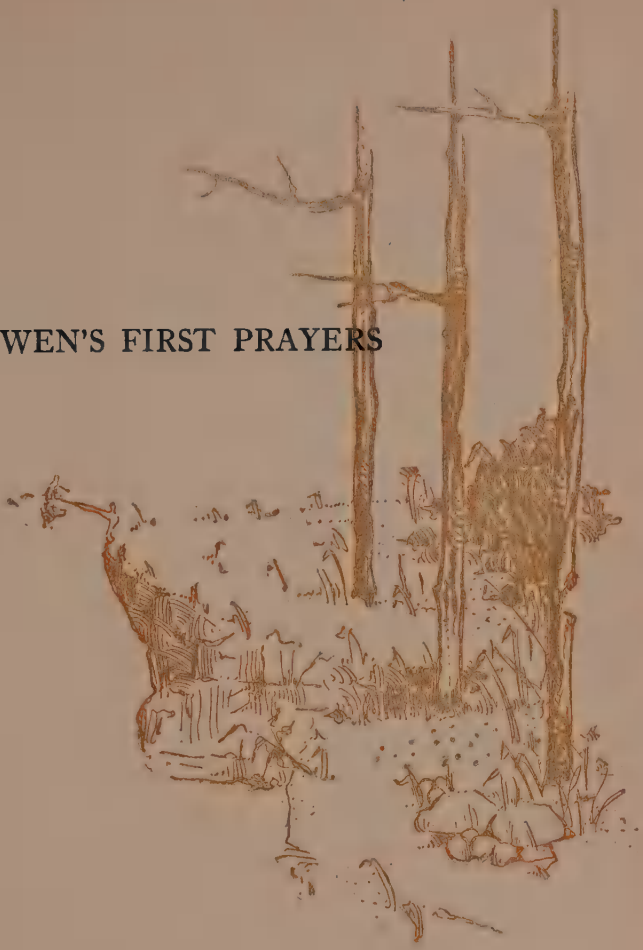
The door opened upon the main or living room. It was a long apartment, with low ceiling and walls of hewn logs chinked and plastered and all beautifully whitewashed and clean. The tables, chairs, and benches were all home-made. On the floor were magnificent skins of wolf, bear, musk ox, and mountain goat. The walls were decorated with heads and horns of deer and mountain sheep, eagles' wings, and a beautiful breast of a loon, which Gwen had shot and of which she was very proud. At one end of the room a huge stone fireplace stood radiant in its summer decorations of ferns and grasses and wild-flowers. At the other end a door opened into another room, smaller and richly furnished with relics of former grandeur.

Everything was clean and well kept. Every nook, shelf, and corner was decked with flowers and ferns from the canyon.

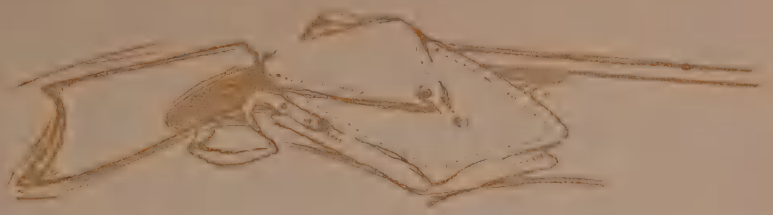
A strange house it was, full of curious contrasts, but it fitted this quaint child that welcomed me with such gracious courtesy.



GWEN'S FIRST PRAYERS







II

GWEN'S FIRST PRAYERS

It was with hesitation, almost with fear, that I began with Gwen; but even had I been able to foresee the endless series of exasperations through which she was destined to conduct me, still would I have undertaken my task. For the child, with all her wilfulness, her tempers, and her pride, made me, as she did all others, her willing slave.

Her lessons went on, brilliantly or not at all, according to her sweet will. She learned to read with extraordinary rapidity, for she was eager to know more of that great world of which The Duke had told her such thrilling tales. Writing she abhorred. She had no one to write to. Why should she cramp her fingers over these crooked little marks? But she mastered with hardly a struggle the mysteries of figures, for she would have to sell her cattle, and "dad doesn't know when

they are cheating." Her ideas of education were purely utilitarian, and what did not appear immediately useful she refused to trifle with. And so all through the following long winter she vexed my righteous soul with her wilfulness and pride. An appeal to her father was idle. She would wind her long, thin arms about his neck and let her waving red hair float over him until the old man was quite helpless to exert authority. The Duke could do most with her. To please him she would struggle with her crooked letters for an hour at a time, but even his influence and authority had its limits.

"Must I?" she said one day in answer to a demand of his for more faithful study; "must *I?*" And throwing up her proud little head, and shaking back, with a trick she had, her streaming red hair, she looked straight at him from her blue-gray eyes and asked the monosyllabic question, "Why?" And The Duke looked back at her with his slight smile for a few moments and then said in cold, even tones:

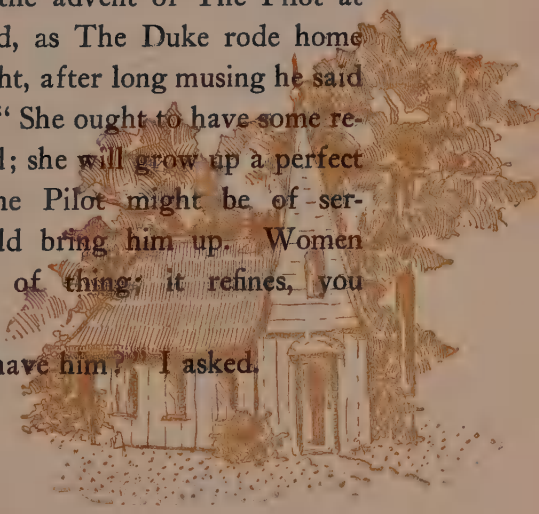
"I really don't know why," and turned his

back on her. Immediately she sprang at him, shook him by the arm, and, quivering with passion, cried:

"You are not to speak to me like that, and you are not to turn your back that way!"

"What a little princess it is," he said admiringly, "and what a time she will give herself some day!" Then he added, smiling sadly: "Was I rude, Gwen? Then I am sorry." Her rage was gone and she looked as if she could have held him by the feet. As it was, too proud to show her feelings, she just looked at him with softening eyes, and then sat down to the work she had refused. This was after the advent of The Pilot at Swan Creek, and, as The Duke rode home with me that night, after long musing he said with hesitation: "She ought to have some religion, poor child; she will grow up a perfect little devil. The Pilot might be of service if you could bring him up. Women need that sort of thing; it refines, you know."

"Would she have him?" I asked.



"Question," he replied doubtfully. "You might suggest it."

Which I did, introducing somewhat clumsily, I fear, The Duke's name.

"The Duke says he is to make me good!" she cried. "I won't have him, I hate him and you too!" And for that day she disdained all lessons, and when The Duke next appeared she greeted him with the exclamation, "I won't have your old Pilot, and I don't want to be good, and—and—you think he's no good yourself," at which The Duke opened his eyes.

"How do you know? I never said so!"

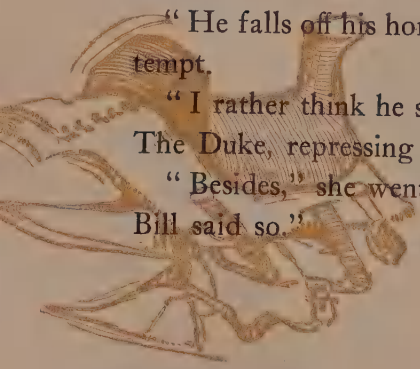
"You laughed at him to dad one day."

"Did I?" said the Duke gravely. "Then I hasten to assure you that I have changed my mind. He is a good, brave man."

"He falls off his horse," she said with contempt.

"I rather think he sticks on now," replied The Duke, repressing a smile.

"Besides," she went on, "he's just a kid; Bill said so."



"Well, he might be more ancient," acknowledged The Duke, "but in that he is steadily improving."

"Anyway," with an air of finality, "he is not to come here."

But he did come, and under her own escort, one threatening August evening.

"I found him in the creek," she announced, with defiant shamefacedness, marching in The Pilot half drowned.

"I think I could have crossed," he said apologetically, "for Louis was getting on his feet again."

"No, you wouldn't," she protested. "You would have been down in the canyon by now, and you ought to be thankful."

"So I am," he hastened to say, "very! But," he added, unwilling to give up his contention, "I have crossed the Swan before."

"Not when it was in flood."

"Yes, when it was in flood, higher than now."

"Not where the banks are rocky."

"No-o!" he hesitated.

"There, then, you *would* have been drowned but for my lariat!" she cried triumphantly.

To this he doubtfully assented.

They were much alike, in high temper, in enthusiasm, in vivid imagination, and in sensitive feeling. When the Old Timer came in Gwen triumphantly introduced The Pilot as having been rescued from a watery grave by her lariat, and again they fought out the possibilities of drowning and of escape till Gwen almost lost her temper, and was appeased only by the most profuse expressions of gratitude on the part of The Pilot for her timely assistance. The Old Timer was perplexed. He was afraid to offend Gwen and yet unwilling to be cordial to her guest. The Pilot was quick to feel this, and, soon after tea, rose to go. Gwen's disappointment showed in her face.

"Ask him to stay, dad," she said in a whisper. But the half-hearted invitation acted like a spur, and The Pilot was determined to set off.

"There's a bad storm coming," she said; "and besides," she added triumphantly, "you can't cross the Swan."

This settled it, and the most earnest prayers of the Old Timer could not have held him back.

We all went down to see him cross, Gwen leading her pinto. The Swan was far over its banks and in the middle running swift and strong. Louis snorted, refused, and finally plunged. Bravely he swam, till the swift-running water struck him, and over he went on his side, throwing his rider into the water. But The Pilot kept his head, and, holding by the stirrups, paddled along by Louis' side. When they were half-way across Louis saw he had no chance of making the landing; so, like a sensible horse, he turned and made for the shore. Here, too, the banks were high, and the pony began to grow discouraged.

"Let him float down further!" shrieked Gwen, in anxious excitement; and, urging her pinto down the bank, she coaxed the struggling pony down the stream till opposite a

shelf of rock level with the high water. Then she threw her lariat, and, catching Louis about the neck and the horn of his saddle, she held taut, till, half drowned, he scrambled up the bank, dragging The Pilot with him.

"Oh, I'm so glad!" she said almost tearfully. "You see you couldn't get across."

The Pilot staggered to his feet, took a step toward her, gasped out:

"I can!" and pitched headlong. With a little cry she flew to him, and turned him over on his back. In a few moments he revived, sat up, and looked about stupidly.

"Where's Louis?" he said, with his face toward the swollen stream.

"Safe enough," she answered; "but you must come in, the rain is just going to pour."

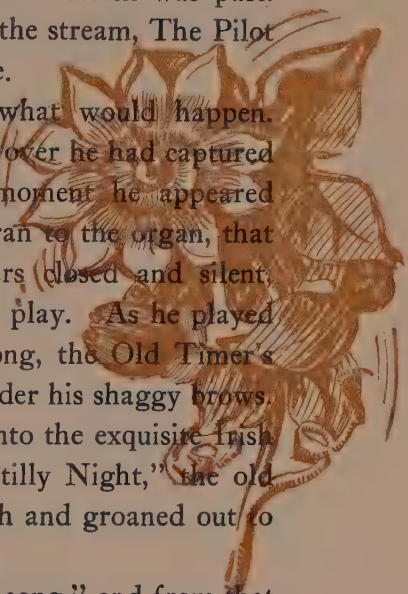
But The Pilot seemed possessed.

"No, I'm going across," he said, rising.

Gwen was greatly distressed.

"But your poor horse," she said, cleverly changing her ground; "he is quite tired out."

The Old Timer now joined earnestly in urging him to stay till the storm was past. So, with a final look at the stream, The Pilot turned toward the house.



Of course I knew what would happen. Before the evening was over he had captured the household. The moment he appeared with dry things on he ran to the organ, that had stood for ten years closed and silent, opened it, and began to play. As he played and sang song after song, the Old Timer's eyes began to glisten under his shaggy brows. But when he dropped into the exquisite Irish melody, "Oft in the Stilly Night," the old man drew a hard breath and groaned out to me:

"It was her mother's song," and from that time The Pilot had him fast. It was easy to pass to the old hymn, "Nearer, My God, to Thee," and then The Pilot said simply, "May we have prayers?" He looked at Gwen, but she gazed blankly at him and then at her father.

"What does he say, dad?"

It was pitiful to see the old man's face

grow slowly red under the deep tan, as he said:

"You may, sir. There's been none here for many years, and the worse for us." He rose slowly, went into the inner room, and returned with a Bible.

"It's her mother's," he said, in a voice deep with emotion. "I put it in her trunk the day I laid her out yonder under the pines."

The Pilot, without looking at him, rose and reverently took the book in both his hands and said gently:

"It was a sad day for you, but for her——" He paused. "You did not grudge it to her?"

"Not now, but then, yes! I wanted her, we needed her." The Old Timer's tears were flowing.

The Pilot put his hand caressingly upon the old man's shoulder as if he had been his father, and said in his clear, sweet voice, "Some day you will go to her."

Upon this scene poor Gwen gazed with eyes wide open with amazement and a kind

of fear. She had never seen her father weep since the awful day that she could never forget, when he had knelt in dumb agony beside the bed on which her mother lay, white and still; nor would he heed her till, climbing up, she tried to make her mother waken and hear her cries. Then he had caught her up in his arms, pressing her with tears and great sobs to his heart. To-night she seemed to feel that something was wrong. She went and stood by her father, and, stroking his gray hair kindly, she said:

"What is he saying, daddy? Is he making you cry?" She looked at The Pilot defiantly.

"No, no, child," said the old man hastily, "sit here and listen."

And while the storm raved outside we three sat listening to that ancient story of love ineffable. And, as the words fell like sweet music upon our ears, the old man sat with eyes that looked far away, while the child listened with devouring eagerness.

"Is it a fairy tale, daddy?" she asked, as The Pilot paused. "It isn't true, is it?" and

her voice had a pleading note hard for the old man to bear.

"Yes, yes, my child," said he brokenly. "God forgive me!"

"Of course it's true," said The Pilot quickly. "I'll read it all to you to-morrow. It's a beautiful story!"

"No," she said imperiously, "to-night. Read it now! Go on!" she said, stamping her foot; "don't you hear me?"

The Pilot gazed in surprise at her, and then, turning to the old man, said:

"Shall I?"

The Old Timer simply nodded, and the reading went on. Those were not my best days, and the faith of my childhood was not as it had been; but, as The Pilot carried us through those matchless scenes of self-forgetting love and service, the rapt wonder in the child's face as she listened, the appeal in her voice, as now to her father, and now to me, she cried: "Is *that* true, too? Is it *all* true?" made it impossible for me to hesitate in my answer. And I was glad to find it easy to give my firm adherence to the truth of all

that tale of wonder. And, as more and more it grew upon The Pilot that the story he was reading, so old to him and to all he had ever met, was new to one in that listening group, his face began to glow and his eyes to blaze, and he saw and showed me things that night I had never seen before, nor have I seen them since.

The great figure of the Gospels lived, moved before our eyes. We saw Him bend to touch the blind, we heard Him speak His marvellous teaching, we felt the throbbing excitement of the crowds that pressed against Him.

Suddenly The Pilot stopped, turned over the leaves, and began again: "'And He led them out as far as to Bethany. And He lifted up His hands and blessed them. And it came to pass as He blessed them He was parted from them and a cloud received Him out of their sight.'" There was silence for some minutes, then Gwen said:

"Where did He go?"

"Up into Heaven," answered The Pilot simply.

"That's where mother is?" she said to her father, who nodded in reply.

"Does He know?" she asked. The old man looked distressed.

"Of course He does," said The Pilot, "and she sees Him all the time."

"Oh, daddy!" she cried, "isn't that good?"

But the old man only hid his face in his hands and groaned.

"Yes," went on The Pilot, "and He sees us, too, and hears us speak, and knows our thoughts."

Again the look of wonder and fear came into her eyes, but she said no word. The experiences of the evening had made the world new to her. It could never be the same to her again. It gave me a queer feeling to see her, when we three kneeled to pray, stand helplessly looking on, not knowing what to do, then sink beside her father, and, winding her arms about his neck, cling to him as the words of prayer were spoken into the ear of Him whom no man can see, but who, we believe, is near to all that call upon Him.

Those were Gwen's first " prayers," and in them Gwen's part was small, for fear and wonder filled her heart; but the day was to come, and all too soon, when she should have to pour out her soul with strong crying and tears. That day came and passed, but the story of it is not to be told here.





GWEN'S CHALLENGE







III

GWEN'S CHALLENGE

GWEN was undoubtedly wild and, as The Sky Pilot said, wilful and wicked. Even Bronco Bill and Hi Kendal would say so without, of course, abating one jot of their admiration for her. For fourteen years she had lived chiefly with wild things. The cattle on the range, wild as deer, the coyotes, the jack-rabbits, and the timber wolves were her mates and her instructors. From these she learned her wild ways. The rolling prairie of the Foothill country was her home. She loved it and all things that moved upon it with passionate love, the only kind she was capable of. And all summer long she spent her days riding up and down the range alone, or with her father, or with Joe, or, best of all, with The Duke, her hero and her friend. So she grew up strong, wholesome, and self-reliant,

fearing nothing alive, and as untamed as a yearling range colt.

She was not beautiful. The winds and sun had left her no complexion to speak of, but the glory of her red hair, gold-red, with purple sheen, nothing could tarnish. Her eyes, too, deep blue with rims of gray, that flashed with the glint of steel or shone with melting light as of the stars, according to her mood—those Irish, warm, deep eyes of hers were worth a man's looking at.

Of course, all spoiled her. Ponka and her son Joe grovelled in abjectest adoration, while her father and all who came within touch of her simply did her will. Even The Duke, who loved her better than anything else, yielded lazy, admiring homage to his Little Princess, and certainly, when she stood straight up with her proud little gold-crowned head thrown back, flashing forth wrath or issuing imperious commands, she looked a princess, all of her.

It was a great day and a good day for her when she fished The Sky Pilot out of the Swan and brought him home, and the night of

Gwen's first "prayers," when she heard for the first time the story of the Man of Nazareth, was the best of all her nights up to that time. All through the winter, under The Pilot's guidance, she, with her father, the Old Timer, listening near, went over and over that story so old now to many, but ever becoming new, till a whole new world of mysterious Powers and Presences lay open to her imagination and became the home of great realities. She was rich in imagination, and, when The Pilot read Bunyan's immortal poem, her mother's old "Pilgrim's Progress," she moved and lived beside the hero of that tale, backing him up in his fights and consumed with anxiety over his many impending perils, till she had him safely across the river and delivered into the charge of the shining ones.

The Pilot himself, too, was a new and wholesome experience. He was the first thing she had yet encountered that refused submission, and the first human being that had failed to fall down and worship. There was something in him that would not *always*

yield, and, indeed, her pride and her imperious tempers he met with surprise and sometimes with a pity that verged toward contempt. With this she was not well pleased, and not infrequently she broke forth upon him. One of these outbursts is stamped upon my mind, not only because of its unusual violence, but chiefly because of the events which followed. The original cause of her rage was some trifling misdeed of the unfortunate Joe; but when I came upon the scene it was The Pilot who was occupying her attention. The expression of surprise and pity on his face appeared to stir her up.

"How dare you look at me like that?" she cried.

"How very extraordinary that you can't keep hold of yourself better!" he answered.

"I can!" she stamped, "and I shall do as I like!"

"It is a great pity," he said, with provoking calm, "and besides, it is weak and silly." His words were unfortunate.

"Weak!" she gasped, when her breath came back to her. "Weak!"

"Yes," he said, "very weak and childish."

Then she could have cheerfully put him to a slow and cruel death. When she had recovered a little she cried vehemently:

"I'm not weak! I'm strong! I'm stronger than you are! I'm strong as—as—a man!"

I do not suppose she meant the insinuation; at any rate The Pilot ignored it and went on:

"You're not strong enough to keep your temper down." And then, as she had no reply ready, he went on, "And really, Gwen, it is not right. You must not go on in this way."

Again his words were unfortunate.

"*Must not!*" she cried, adding an inch to her height. "Who says so?"

"God!" was the simple, short answer.

She was greatly taken back, and gave a quick glance over her shoulder as if to see Him who would dare to say *must not* to her; but recovering, she answered sullenly:

"I don't care!"

"Don't care for God?" The Pilot's

voice was quiet and solemn, but something in his manner angered her, and she blazed forth again.

"I don't care for anyone, and I *shall* do as I like."

The Pilot looked at her sadly for a moment, and then said slowly:

"Some day, Gwen, you will not be able to do as you like."

I remember well the settled defiance in her tone and manner as she took a step nearer him and answered in a voice trembling with passion:

"Listen! I have always done as I like, and I shall do as I like till I die!" And she rushed forth from the house and down toward the canyon, her refuge from all disturbing things, and chiefly from herself.

I could not shake off the impression her words made upon me. "Pretty direct, that," I said to The Pilot, as we rode away. "The declaration may be philosophically correct, but it rings uncommonly like a challenge to the Almighty. Throws down the gauntlet, so to speak."

But The Pilot only said, "Don't! How can you?"

Within a week her challenge was accepted, and how fiercely and how gallantly did she struggle to make it good!

It was The Duke that brought me the news, and as he told me the story his gay, careless self-command for once was gone. For in the gloom of the canyon where he overtook me I could see his white face gleaming out ghastly white, and even his iron nerve could not keep the tremor from his voice.

"I've just sent up the doctor," was his answer to my greeting. "I looked for you last night, couldn't find you, and so rode off to the Fort."

"What's up?" I said, with fear in my heart, for no light thing moved The Duke.

"Haven't you heard? It's Gwen," he said, and the next minute or two he gave to Jingo, who was indulging in a series of unexpected plunges. When Jingo was brought down, The Duke was master of himself and told his tale with careful self-control.

Gwen, on her father's buckskin bronco, had gone with The Duke to the big plain above the cut-bank where Joe was herding the cattle. The day was hot and a storm was in the air. They found Joe riding up and down, singing to keep the cattle quiet, but having a hard time to hold the bunch from breaking. While The Duke was riding around the far side of the bunch, a cry from Gwen arrested his attention. Joe was in trouble. His horse, a half-broken cayuse, had stumbled into a badger-hole and had bolted, leaving Joe to the mercy of the cattle. At once they began to sniff suspiciously at this phenomenon, a man on foot, and to follow cautiously on his track. Joe kept his head and walked slowly out, till all at once a young cow began to bawl and to paw the ground. In another minute one and then another of the cattle began to toss their heads and bunch and bellow till the whole herd of two hundred were after Joe. Then Joe lost his head and ran. Immediately the whole herd broke into a thundering gallop, with heads and tails aloft and horns rattling like the loading of a regiment of rifles.

"Two more minutes," said The Duke, "would have done for Joe, for I could never have reached him; but, in spite of my most frantic warnings and signalings, right into the face of that mad, bellowing, thundering mass of steers rode that little girl. Nerve! I have some myself, but I couldn't have done it. She swung her horse round Joe and sailed out with him, with the herd bellowing at the tail of her bronco. I've seen some cavalry things in my day, but for sheer cool bravery nothing touches that."

"How did it end? Did they run them down?" I asked, with terror at such a result.

"No, they crowded her toward the cut-bank, and she was edging them off and was almost past, when they came to a place where the bank bit in, and her iron-mouthed brute wouldn't swerve, but went pounding on, broke through, plunged; she couldn't spring free because of Joe, and pitched headlong over the bank, while the cattle went thundering past. I flung myself off Jingo and slid down somehow into the sand, thirty feet below. Here

was Joe safe enough, but the bronco lay with a broken leg, and half under him was Gwen. She hardly knew she was hurt, but waved her hand to me and cried out, 'Wasn't that a race? I couldn't swing this hard-headed brute. Get me out.' But even as she spoke the light faded from her eyes, she stretched out her hands to me, saying faintly, 'Oh, Duke,' and lay back white and still. We put a bullet into the buckskin's head, and carried her home in our jackets, and there she lies without a sound from her poor, white lips."

The Duke was badly cut up. I had never seen him show any sign of grief before, but as he finished the story he stood ghastly and shaking. He read my surprise in my face, and said:

"Look here, old chap, don't think me quite a fool. You can't know what that little girl has done for me these years. Her trust in me—it is extraordinary how utterly she trusts me—somehow held me up to my best and back from perdition. It is the one bright spot in my life in this blessed country. Every-

one else thinks me a pleasant or unpleasant kind of fiend."

I protested rather faintly.

"Oh, don't worry your conscience," he answered, with a slight return of his old smile; "a fuller knowledge would only justify the opinion." Then, after a pause, he added: "But if Gwen goes, I must pull out, I could not stand it."

As we rode up, the doctor came out.

"Well, what do you think?" asked The Duke.

"Can't say yet," replied the old doctor, gruff with long army practice, "bad enough. Good-night."

But The Duke's hand fell upon his shoulder with a grip that must have gone to the bone, and in a husky voice he asked:

"Will she live?"

The doctor squirmed, but could not shake off that crushing grip.

"Here, you young tiger, let go! What do you think I am made of?" he cried angrily. "I didn't suppose I was coming to a bear's den, or I should have brought a gun."

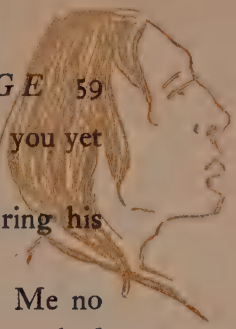
It was only by the most complete apology that The Duke could mollify the old doctor sufficiently to get his opinion.

"No, she will not die! Great bit of stuff! Better she should die, perhaps! But can't say yet for two weeks. Now remember," he added sharply, looking into The Duke's woe-stricken face, "her spirits must be kept up. I have lied most fully and cheerfully to them inside; you must do the same," and the doctor strode away, calling out:

"Joe! Here, Joe! Where is he gone? Joe, I say! Extraordinary selection Providence makes at times; we could have spared that lazy half-breed with pleasure! Joe! Oh, here you are! Where in thunder——" But here the doctor stopped abruptly. The agony in the dark face before him was too much even for the bluff doctor. Straight and stiff Joe stood by the horse's head till the doctor had mounted, then with a great effort he said:

"Little miss, she go dead?"

"Dead!" called out the doctor, glancing at the open window. "Why, bless your old



copper carcass, no! Gwen will show you yet how to rope a steer."

Joe took a step nearer, and lowering his tone said:

"You speak me true? Me man, Me no papoose." The piercing black eyes searched the doctor's face. The doctor hesitated a moment, and then, with an air of great candor, said cheerfully:

"That's all right, Joe. Miss Gwen will cut circles round your old cayuse yet. But remember," and the doctor was very impressive, "you must make her laugh every day."

Joe folded his arms across his breast and stood like a statue till the doctor rode away; then, turning to us, he grunted out:

"Him good man, eh?"

"Good man," answered The Duke, adding, "but remember, Joe, what he told you to do. Must make her laugh every day."

Poor Joe! Humor was not his *forte,* and his attempts in this direction in the weeks that followed would have been humorous were they not so pathetic. How I did my part I cannot tell. Those weeks are to me now like the

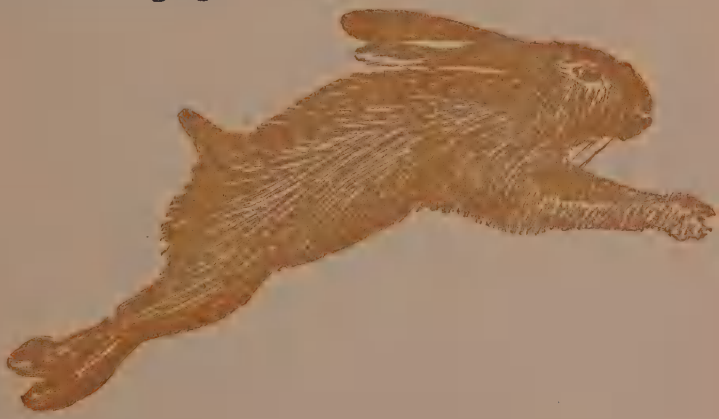
memory of an ugly nightmare. The ghostly old man moving in and out of his little daughter's room in useless, dumb agony; Ponka's woe-stricken Indian face; Joe's extraordinary and unusual but loyal attempts at fun-making grotesquely sad, and The Duke's unvarying and invincible cheeriness; these furnish light and shade for the picture my memory brings me of Gwen in those days.

For the first two weeks she was simply heroic. She bore her pain without a groan, submitted to the imprisonment which was harder than pain with angelic patience. Joe, The Duke, and I carried out our instructions with careful exactness to the letter. She never doubted, and we never let her doubt but that in a few weeks she would be on the pinto's back again and after the cattle. She made us pass our word for this till it seemed as if she must have read the falsehoods on our brows.

"To lie cheerfully, with her eyes upon one's face, calls for more than I possess," said The Duke one day. "The doctor should supply us tonics. It is an arduous task."

And she believed us absolutely, and made plans for the fall "round up," and for hunts and rides till one's heart grew sick. As to the ethical problem involved, I decline to express an opinion, but we had no need to wait for our punishment. Her trust in us, her eager and confident expectation of the return of her happy, free, outdoor life; these brought to us, who knew how vain they were, their own adequate punishment for every false assurance we gave. And how bright and brave she was those first days! How resolute to get back to the world of air and light outside!

But she had need of all her brightness and courage and resolution before she was done with her long fight.

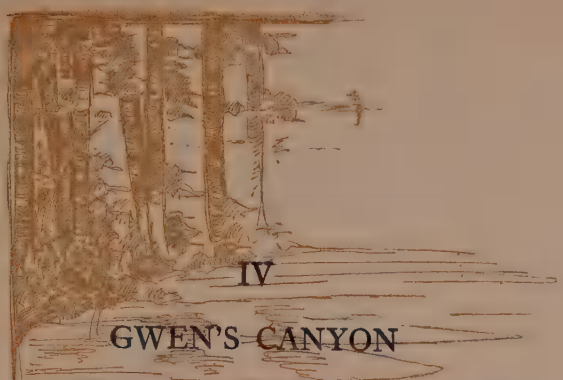






GWEN'S CANYON





IV

GWEN'S CANYON

GWEN'S hope and bright courage, in spite of all her pain, were wonderful to witness. But all this cheery hope and courage and patience snuffed out as a candle, leaving noisome darkness to settle down in that sick-room from the day of the doctor's consultation.

The verdict was clear and final. The old doctor, who loved Gwen as his own, was inclined to hope against hope, but Fawcett, the clever young doctor from the distant town, was positive in his opinion. The scene is clear to me now, after many years. We three stood in the outer room; The Duke and her father were with Gwen. So earnest was the discussion that none of us heard the door open just as young Fawcett was saying in incisive tones:

"No! I can see no hope. The child can never walk again."

There was a cry behind us.

"What! Never walk again! It's a lie!" There stood the Old Timer, white, fierce, shaking.

"Hush!" said the old doctor, pointing at the open door. He was too late. Even as he spoke, there came from the inner room a wild, unearthly cry as of some dying thing, and, as we stood gazing at one another with awe-stricken faces, we heard Gwen's voice as in quick, sharp pain.

"Daddy! daddy! come! What do they say? Tell me, daddy. It is not true! It is not true! Look at me, daddy!"

She pulled up her father's haggard face from the bed.

"Oh, daddy, daddy, you know it's true. Never walk again!"

She turned with a pitiful cry to The Duke, who stood white and stiff with arms drawn tight across his breast on the other side of the bed.

"Oh, Duke, did you hear them? You told me to be brave, and I tried not to cry when they hurt me. But I can't be brave!

Can I, Duke? Oh, Duke! Never to ride again?"

She stretched out her hands to him. But The Duke, leaning over her and holding her hands fast in his, could only say brokenly, over and over: "Don't, Gwen! Don't, Gwen, dear!"

But the pitiful, pleading voice went on:

"Oh, Duke! Must I always lie here? Must I? Why must I?"

"God knows," answered The Duke bitterly, under his breath, "I don't!"

She caught at the word.

"Does He?" she cried eagerly. Then she paused suddenly, turned to me, and said: "Do you remember he said some day I could not do as I liked?"

I was puzzled.

"The Pilot," she cried impatiently. "Don't you remember? And I said I should do as I liked till I died."

I nodded my head and said: "But you know you didn't mean it."

"But I did, and I do," she cried, with passionate vehemence, "and I will do as I like.

I will not lie here! I will ride! I will! I will! I will!" and she struggled up, clenched her fists, and sank back faint and weak. It was not a pleasant sight, but gruesome. Her rage against that Unseen Omnipotence was so defiant and so helpless.

Those were dreadful weeks to Gwen and to all about her. The constant pain could not break her proud spirit; she shed no tears; but she fretted and chafed and grew more imperiously exacting every day. Ponka and Joe she drove like a slave master, and even her father, when he could not understand her wishes, she impatiently banished from her room. Only The Duke could please or bring her any cheer, and even The Duke began to feel that the day was not far off when he, too, would fail, and the thought made him despair. Her pain was hard to bear, but harder than the pain was her longing for the open air and the free, flower-strewn, breeze-swept prairie. But most pitiful of all were the days when, in her utter weariness and uncontrollable unrest, she would pray to be taken down into the canyon.

"Oh, it is so cool and shady," she would plead, "and the flowers up in the rocks, and the vines and things, are all so lovely. I am always better there. I know I should be better," till The Duke would be distracted and would come to me and wonder what the end would be.

One day, when the strain had been more terrible than usual, The Duke rode down to me and said:

"Look here, this thing can't go on. Where is The Pilot gone? Why doesn't he stay where he belongs? I wish to Heaven he would get through with his absurd rambling."

"He's gone where he was sent," I replied shortly. "You don't set much store by him when he does come round. He is gone on an exploring trip through the Dog Lake country. He'll be back by the end of next week."

"I say, bring him up, for Heaven's sake," said The Duke; "he may be of some use, and anyway it will be a new face for her, poor child." Then he added, rather penitently: "I fear this thing is getting on to my nerves.

She almost drove me out to-day. Don't lay it up against me, old chap."

It was a new thing to hear The Duke confess his need of any man, much less penitence for a fault. I felt my eyes growing dim, but I said roughly:

"You be hanged! I'll bring The Pilot up when he comes."

It was wonderful how we had all come to confide in The Pilot during his year of missionary work among us. Somehow the cowboy's name of "Sky Pilot" seemed to express better than anything else the place he held with us. Certain it is that when, in their dark hours, any of the fellows felt in need of help to strike the "upward trail," they went to The Pilot; and so the name first given in chaff came to be the name that expressed most truly the deep and tender feeling these rough, big-hearted men cherished for him.

When The Pilot came home I carefully prepared him for his trial, telling all that Gwen had suffered and striving to make him feel how desperate was her case when even The Duke had to confess himself beaten. He did



not seem sufficiently impressed. Then I pictured for him all her fierce wilfulness and her fretful humors, her impatience with those who loved her and were wearing out their souls and bodies for her. "In short," I concluded, "she doesn't care a rush for anything in heaven or earth, and will yield to neither man nor God."

The Pilot's eyes had been kindling as I talked, but he only answered quietly:

"What could you expect?"

"Well, I do think she might show some signs of gratitude and some gentleness towards those ready to die for her."

"Oh, you do!" said he, with high scorn. "You all combine to ruin her temper and disposition with foolish flattery and weak yielding to her whims, right or wrong; you smile at her imperious pride and encourage her wilfulness, and then not only wonder at the results, but blame her, poor child, for all. Oh, you are a fine lot, The Duke and all of you!"

He had a most exasperating ability for putting one in the wrong and I could only think of the proper and sufficient reply long after

the opportunity for making it had passed. I wondered what The Duke would say to this doctrine. All the following day, which was Sunday, I could see that Gwen was on The Pilot's mind. He was struggling with the problem of pain.

Monday morning found us on the way to the Old Timer's ranch. And what a morning it was! How beautiful our world seemed! About us rolled the round-topped, velvet hills, brown and yellow or faintly green, spreading out behind us to the broad prairie, and before, clambering up and up to meet the purple bases of the great mountains that lay their mighty length along the horizon and thrust up white, sunlit peaks into the blue sky. On the hillsides and down in the sheltering hollows we could see th bunches of cattle and horses feeding upon the rich grasses. High above, the sky, cloudless and blue, arched its great kindly roof from prairie to mountain peaks, and over all, above, below, upon prairie, hillsides, and mountains, the sun poured his floods of radiant yellow light.

As we followed the trail that wound up

and into the heart of these rounded hills and ever nearer to the purple mountains, the morning breeze swept down to meet us, bearing a thousand scents, and filling us with its own fresh life. One can know the quickening joyousness of these Foothill breezes only after he has drunk, with wide-open mouth, deep and full of them.

Through all this mingling beauty of sunlit hills and shady hollows and purple, snow-peaked mountains, we rode with hardly a word, every minute adding to our heart-filling delight, but ever with the thought of the little room where, shut in from all this outside glory, lay Gwen, heart-sore with fretting and longing. This must have been in The Pilot's mind, for he suddenly held up his horse and burst out:

"Poor Gwen, how she loves all this!—it is her very life. How can she help fretting the heart out of her? To see this no more!" He flung himself off his bronco and said, as if thinking aloud: "It is too awful! Oh, it is cruel! I don't wonder at her! God help me, what can I say to her?"

He threw himself down upon the grass and turned over on his face. After a few minutes he appealed to me, and his face was sorely troubled:

"How can one go to her? It seems to me sheerest mockery to speak of patience and submission to a wild young thing from whom all this is suddenly snatched forever —and this was very life to her, too, remember."

Then he sprang up and we rode hard for an hour, till we came to the mouth of the canyon. Here the trail grew difficult, and we came to a walk. As we went down into the cool depths the spirit of the canyon came to meet us and took The Pilot in its grip. He rode in front, feasting his eyes on all the wonders in that storehouse of beauty. Trees of many kinds deepened the shadows of the canyon. Over us waved the big elms that grew up here and there out of the bottom, and around their feet clustered low cedars and hemlocks and balsams, while the sturdy, rugged oaks and delicate, trembling poplars clung to the rocky sides and clam-

bered up and out to the canyon's sunny lips. Back of all, the great black rocks, decked with mossy bits and clinging things, glistened cool and moist between the parting trees. From many an oozy nook the dainty clematis and columbine shook out their bells, and, lower down, from beds of many-colored moss the late wind-flower and maiden-hair and tiny violet lifted up brave, sweet faces. And through the canyon the Little Swan sang its song to rocks and flowers and overhanging trees, a song of many tones, deep-booming where it took its first sheer plunge, gay-chattering where it threw itself down the ragged rocks, and soft-murmuring where it lingered about the roots of the loving, listening elms. A cool, sweet, soothing place it was, with all its shades and sounds and silences, and, lest it should be sad to any, the sharp, quick sunbeams danced and laughed down through all its leaves upon mosses, flowers, and rocks. No wonder that The Pilot, drawing a deep breath as he touched the prairie sod again, said:

"That does me good. It is better at times

even than the sunny hills. This was Gwen's best spot."

I saw that the canyon had done its work with him. His face was strong and calm as the hills on a summer morning, and with this face he looked in upon Gwen. It was one of her bad days and one of her bad moods, but like a summer breeze he burst into the little room.

"Oh, Gwen!" he cried, without a word of greeting, much less of commiseration, "we have had such a ride!" And he spread out the sunlit, round-topped hills before her, till I could feel their very breezes in my face. This The Duke had never dared to do, fearing to grieve her with pictures of what she should look upon no more. But, as The Pilot talked, before she knew, Gwen was out again upon her beloved hills, breathing their fresh, sunny air, filling her heart with their multitudinous delights, till her eyes grew bright and the lines of fretting smoothed out of her face and she forgot her pain. Then, before she could remember, he had her down into the canyon, feasting her heart with its

airs and sights and sounds. The black, glistening rocks, tricked out with moss and trailing vines, the great elms and low, green cedars, the oaks and shivering poplars, the clematis and columbine hanging from the rocky nooks, and the violets and maiden-hair deep bedded in their mosses. All this and far more he showed her with a touch so light as not to shake the morning dew from bell or leaf or frond, and with a voice so soft and full of music as to fill our hearts with the canyon's mingling sounds, and, as I looked upon her face, I said to myself: "Dear old Pilot! for this I shall always love you well." As poor Gwen listened, the rapture of it drew the big tears down her cheeks—alas! no longer brown, but white, and for that day at least the dull, dead weariness was lifted from her heart.

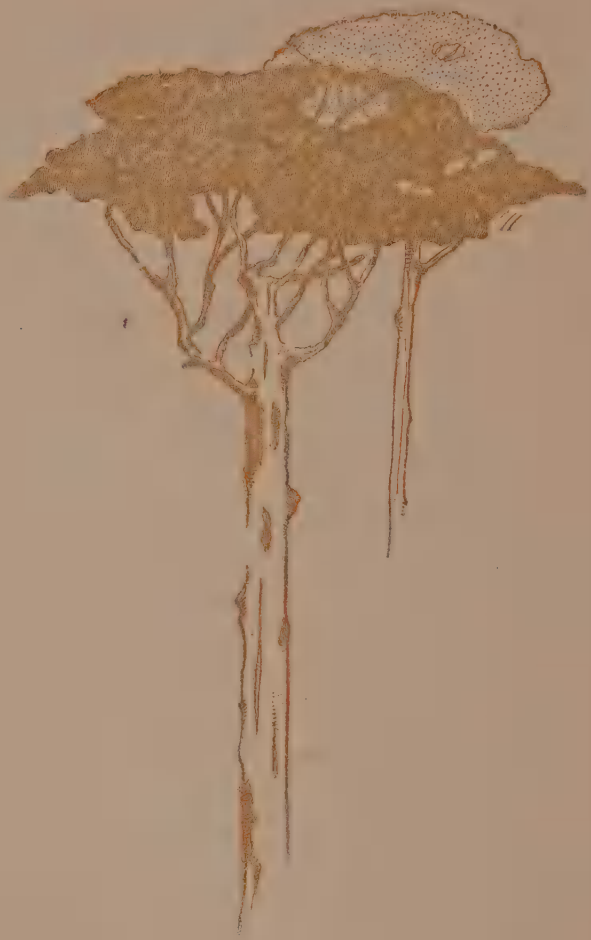







THE CANYON FLOWERS







V

THE CANYON FLOWERS

THE PILOT'S first visit to Gwen had been a triumph. But none knew better than he that the fight was still to come, for deep in Gwen's heart were thoughts whose pain made her forget all other.

"Was it God let me fall?" she asked abruptly one day, and The Pilot knew the fight was on; but he only answered, looking fearlessly into her eyes:

"Yes, Gwen, dear."

"Why did He let me fall?" and her voice was very deliberate.

"I don't know, Gwen, dear," said The Pilot steadily. "He knows."

"And does He know I shall never ride again? Does He know how long the days are, and the nights when I can't sleep? Does He know?"

"Yes, Gwen, dear," said The Pilot, and

the tears were standing in his eyes, though his voice was still steady enough.

"Are you sure he knows?" The voice was painfully intense.

"Listen to me, Gwen," began The Pilot, in great distress, but she cut him short.

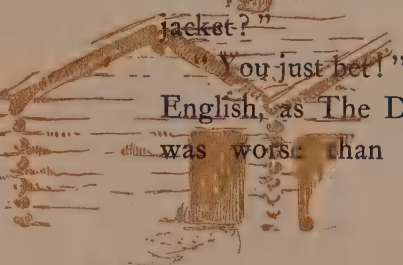
"Are you quite sure He knows? Answer me!" she cried, with her old imperiousness.

"Yes, Gwen, He knows all about you."

"Then what do you think of Him, just because He's big and strong, treating a little girl that way?" Then she added viciously: "I hate Him! I don't care! I hate Him!"

But The Pilot did not wince. I wondered how he would solve that problem that was puzzling, not only Gwen, but her father and The Duke, and all of us—the *why* of human pain.

"Gwen," said The Pilot, as if changing the subject, "did it hurt to put on the plaster jacket?"



"You just bet!" said Gwen, lapsing in her English, as The Duke was not present; "it was worse than anything—awful! They

had to straighten me out, you know," and she shuddered at the memory of that pain.

"What a pity your father or The Duke was not here!" said The Pilot earnestly.

"Why, they were both here!"

"What a cruel shame!" burst out The Pilot. "Don't they care for you any more?"

"Of course they do," said Gwen indignantly.

"Why didn't they stop the doctors from hurting you so cruelly?"

"Why, they let the doctors. It is going to help me to sit up and perhaps to walk about a little," answered Gwen, with gray-blue eyes open wide.

"Oh," said The Pilot, "it was very mean to stand by and see you hurt like that."

"Why, you silly," replied Gwen impatiently, "they want my back to get straight and strong."

"Oh, then they didn't do it just for fun or for nothing?" said The Pilot innocently.

Gwen gazed at him in amazed and speechless wrath, and he went on:

"I mean they love you, though they let you be hurt; or rather they let the doctors hurt you *because* they loved you and wanted to make you better."

Gwen kept her eyes fixed with curious earnestness upon his face till the light began to dawn.

"Do you mean," she began slowly, "that though God let me fall, He loves me?"

The Pilot nodded; he could not trust his voice.

"I wonder if that can be true," she said, as if to herself; and soon we said good-by and came away—The Pilot limp and voiceless, but I triumphant, for I began to see a little light for Gwen.

But the fight was by no means over; indeed, it was hardly well begun. For when the autumn came, with its misty, purple days, most glorious of all days in the cattle country, the old restlessness came back and the fierce refusal of her lot. Then came the day of the round-up. Why should she have to stay while all went after the cattle? The Duke would have remained, but she impatiently

sent him away. She was very weary and heart-sick, and, worst of all, she began to feel that most terrible of burdens, the burden of her life to others. I was much relieved when The Pilot came in fresh and bright, waving a bunch of wild-flowers in his hand.

"I thought they were all gone," he cried. "Where do you think I found them? Right down by the big elm root," and, though he saw by the settled gloom of her face that the storm was coming, he went bravely on picturing the canyon in all the splendor of its autumn dress. But the spell would not work. Her heart was out on the sloping hills, where the cattle were bunching and crowding with tossing heads and rattling horns, and it was in a voice very bitter and impatient that she cried:

"Oh, I am sick of all this! I want to ride! I want to see the cattle and the men and—and—and all the things outside." The Pilot was cowboy enough to know the longing that tugged at her heart for one wild race after the calves or steers, but he could only say:

"Wait, Gwen. Try to be patient."

"I am patient; at least I have been patient for two whole months, and it's no use, and I don't believe God cares one bit!"

"Yes, He does, Gwen—more than any of us," replied The Pilot earnestly.

"No, He does not care," she answered, with angry emphasis, and The Pilot made no reply.

"Perhaps," she went on hesitatingly, "He's angry because I said I didn't care for Him, you remember? That was very wicked. But don't you think I'm punished nearly enough now? You made me very angry, and I didn't really mean it."

Poor Gwen! God had grown to be very real to her during these weeks of pain, and very terrible. The Pilot looked down a moment into the blue-gray eyes, grown so big and so pitiful, and hurriedly dropping on his knees beside the bed he said, in a very unsteady voice:

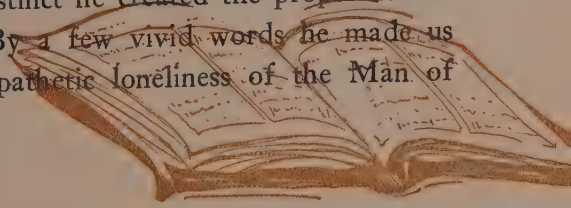
"Oh, Gwen, Gwen, He's not like that. Don't you remember how Jesus was with the poor sick people? That's what He's like."

"Could Jesus make me well?"

"Yes, Gwen."

"Then why doesn't He?" she asked; and there was no impatience now, but only trembling anxiety as she went on in a timid voice: "I asked Him to, over and over, and said I would wait two months, and now it's more than three. Are you quite sure He hears now?" She raised herself on her elbow and gazed searchingly into The Pilot's face. I was glad it was not into mine. As she uttered the words, "Are you quite sure?" one felt that things were in the balance. I could not help looking at The Pilot with intense anxiety. What would he answer? The Pilot gazed out of the window upon the hills for a few moments. How long the silence seemed! Then, turning, he looked into the eyes that searched his so steadily and answered simply:

"Yes, Gwen, I am quite sure!" Then, with quick inspiration, he got her mother's Bible and said: "Now, Gwen, try to see it as I read." But before he read, with the true artist's instinct he created the proper atmosphere. By a few vivid words he made us feel the pathetic loneliness of the Man of



Sorrows in His last sad days. Then he read that masterpiece of all tragic picturing, the story of Gethsemane. And as he read we saw it all. The garden and the trees and the sorrow-stricken Man alone with His mysterious agony. We heard the prayer so pathetically submissive, and then, for answer, the rabble and the traitor.

Gwen was far too quick to need explanation, and The Pilot only said, "You see, Gwen, God gave nothing but the best—to His own Son only the best."

"The best? They took Him away, didn't they?" She knew the story well.

"Yes, but listen." He turned the leaves rapidly and read: "'We see Jesus for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor.' That is how He got His Kingdom."

Gwen listened silent but unconvinced, and then said slowly:

"But how can this be best for me? I am no use to anyone. It can't be best to just lie here and make them all wait on me, and—and—I did want to help daddy—and—oh—I know they will get tired of me! They are

getting tired already. I—I—can't help being hateful."

She was by this time sobbing as I had never heard her before—deep, passionate sobs. Then again The Pilot had an inspiration.

"Now, Gwen," he said severely, "you know we're not as mean as that, and that you are just talking nonsense, every word. Now I'm going to smooth out your red hair and tell you a story."

"It's not red," she cried, between her sobs. This was her sore point.

"It is red as red can be; a beautiful, shining purple *red,*" said The Pilot emphatically, beginning to brush.

"Purple!" cried Gwen scornfully.

"Yes, I've seen it in the sun, purple. Haven't you?" said The Pilot, appealing to me. "And my story is about the canyon, our canyon, your canyon, down there."

"Is it true?" asked Gwen, already soothed by the cool, quick-moving hands.

"True? It's as true as—as"—he glanced round the room—"as the Pilgrim's Progress." This was satisfactory, and the story went on.



"At first there were no canyons, but only the broad, open prairie. One day the Master of the Prairie, walking out over his great lawns, where were only grasses, asked the Prairie, 'Where are your flowers?' and the Prairie said, 'Master, I have no seeds.' Then he spoke to the birds, and they carried seeds of every kind of flower and strewed them far and wide, and soon the Prairie bloomed with crocuses and roses, and buffalo beans and the yellow crowfoot, and the wild sunflowers and red lilies all the summer long. Then the Master came and was well pleased; but he missed the flowers he loved best of all and he said to the Prairie, 'Where are the clematis and the columbine, the sweet violets and wind flowers, and all the ferns and flowering shrubs?' And again he spoke to the birds, and again they carried all the seeds and strewed them far and wide. But, again, when the Master came, he could not find the flowers he loved best of all, and he said, 'Where are those, my sweetest flowers?' and the Prairie cried sorrowfully, 'Oh, Master, I cannot keep the flowers, for the winds sweep fiercely, and

the sun beats upon my breast, and they wither up and fly away.' Then the Master spoke to the Lightning, and with one swift blow the Lightning cleft the Prairie to the heart. And the Prairie rocked and groaned in agony, and for many a day moaned bitterly over its black jagged, gaping wound. But the Little Swan poured its waters through the cleft, and carried down deep black mould, and once more the birds carried seeds and strewed them in the canyon. And after a long time the rough rocks were decked out with soft mosses and trailing vines, and all the nooks were hung with clematis and columbine, and great elms lifted their huge tops high up into the sunlight, and down about their feet clustered the low cedars and balsams, and everywhere the violets and wind-flowers and maiden-hair grew and bloomed, till the canyon became the Master's place for rest and peace and joy."

The quaint tale was ended, and Gwen lay quiet for some moments, then said gently:

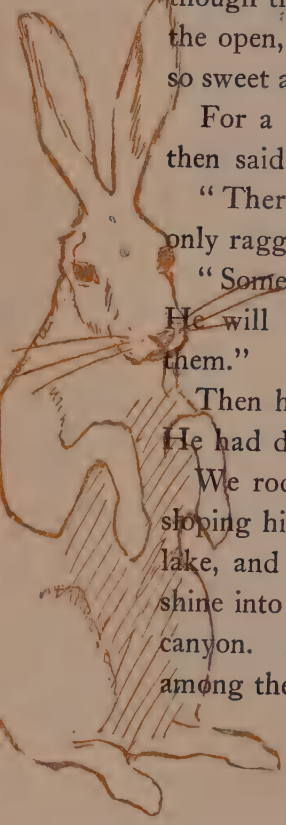
"Yes. The canyon flowers are much the best. Tell me what it means."

Then The Pilot read to her: "'The fruits

—I'll read "flowers"—of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control, and some of these grow only in the canyon.'"

"Which are the canyon flowers?" asked Gwen softly, and The Pilot answered:

"Gentleness, meekness, self-control; but though the others, love, joy, peace, bloom in the open, yet never with so rich a bloom and so sweet a perfume as in the canyon."



For a long time Gwen lay quite still, and then said wistfully, while her lip trembled:

"There are no flowers in my canyon, but only ragged rocks."

"Some day they will bloom, Gwen, dear; He will find them, and we, too, shall see them."

Then he said good-by and took me away. He had done his work that day.

We rode through the big gate, down the sloping hill, past the smiling, twinkling little lake, and down again out of the broad sunshine into the shadows and soft lights of the canyon. As we followed the trail that wound among the elms and cedars, the very air was

full of gentle stillness; and as we moved we seemed to feel the touch of loving hands that lingered while they left us, and every flower and tree and vine and shrub and the soft mosses and the deep-bedded ferns whispered, as we passed, of love and peace and joy.

To The Duke it was all a wonder, for as the days shortened outside they brightened inside; and every day, and more and more, Gwen's room became the brightest spot in all the house, and when he asked The Pilot:

"What did you do to the Little Princess, and what's all this about the canyon and its flowers?" The Pilot said, looking wistfully into The Duke's eyes:

"'The fruits of the Spirit are love, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control, and some of these are found only in the canyon,'" and The Duke, standing up straight, handsome, and strong, looked back at The Pilot and said, putting out his hand:

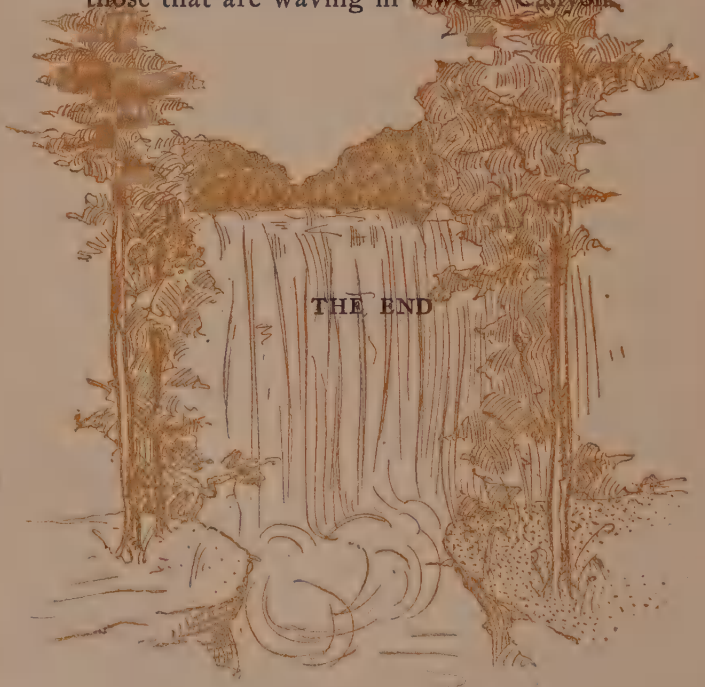
"Do you know, I believe you're right."

"Yes, I'm quite sure," answered The Pilot simply. Then, holding The Duke's hand as

long as one man dare hold another's, he added: "When you come to your canyon, remember."

"When I come!" said The Duke, and a quick spasm of pain passed over his handsome face—"God help me, it's not too far away now." Then he smiled again his old, sweet smile, and said:

"Yes, you are right, for, of all flowers I have seen, none are fairer or sweeter than those that are waving in Gwen's Canyon."



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